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ABSTRACT

In a wide-ranging speech on the question of educational quality in Great Britain, the author observes that the achievement of higher quality "demands the will to act in a hundred ways, even to the point of sacrifice, on the part of teachers, managers, governors, local authorities, the government, parents, newspapers, radio and T.V., and the community as a whole." General efforts that might be made by teachers, parents, and government in improving the quality of education (which the author notes is an ill-defined term) are noted. (MJB)

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THE JOSEPH PAYNE MEMORIAL LECTURE, 1977

of the College of Preceptors

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QUALITY IN EDUCATION

by

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QUALITY IN EDUCATION

To be invited to give the Joseph Payne Memorial Lecture is a great honour. For Joseph Payne was one of the greatest of our educational pioneers. He was the first English Professor of Education, nurturing the infant College of Preceptors at a time when many teachers were untrained, and a substantial minority ill-educated. So he set to work to improve the quality of teachers so that they could improve the quality of the education given children. Thus the title of this lecture would certainly have been applauded by Joseph Payne.

But it is appropriate for another reason. This nation is engaged in a great educational debate. Contributions to the debate have come from the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State, Ministers of Education, Local Authorities, Governors, Managers, Parent-Teacher Associations, Parents, Colleges of Education, Technical Colleges, Polytechnics, Universities, Teachers' Organisations, Journalists, T.V. and Radio Commentators and Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all. Without doubt if the number of people participating, or the number of words written and spoken is any guide, this has been a great debate. For at least there has been plenty of it. As Zola remarked " If I cannot overwhelm with my quality, I will overwhelm with my quantity ".

Of course at times the debate has revealed deep insight and real quality. The Prime Minister's temperate speech, the Secretary of State's wisdom, as for example in constantly advocating in-service training, and the N.U.T.'s insistence that discussing educational standards without reference to resources is unreal, unfair and unproductive, have made me feel at times that the designation " great " was deserved. But alas, such times have been few and fleeting. Many of the contributions have been undistinguished, colourless, mediocre, reminding me of the notice on a stocking counter " Semi-fashioned, Sub-standard ".

I should guess (and since I have not attended any of the Regional Conferences it can be no more than a guess) that the level of contributions to the B.B.C. debate was higher than that of any other held. Robin Day, as I expected, was a firm chairman who rapidly checked wandering from the point at issue. Mrs. Shirley Williams, the Secretary of State for Education, took a leading part, and so did the Shadow Secretary, Mr. St. John Stevas. Parents, teachers, University and College of Education teachers, social workers and industrialists joined in too. Yet to me even this debate was singularly unsatisfactory.

Of course, I could not but be impressed by a number of wise and useful contributions. Mrs. Williams declared schools had suffered from rapid changes in the curriculum and rapid turnover of staff, though she welcomed signs of a new stability. It's a pity other forms of instability were not mentioned. What of the frequent changes in school organisation? In rapid succession teachers and children have endured splitting all-standard into Primary and Secondary schools, the building of new Modern and Grammar schools, and then reorganisation of secondary schools into Comprehensive schools. And each kind of reorganisation has often

been achieved by makeshift followed by more permanent arrangements. And what of the instability in Colleges of Education—constant expansion, at least until recently, overcrowding, new building extensions, changes in curriculum, the change from a two year to a three year course, the development of the B.Ed., all made more difficult the education of teachers. Some criticise the quality of the College of Education output. I, on the other hand, am amazed at the quality, when the Colleges have had so much change to endure. Yes, undoubtedly instability is the enemy of quality, a thought future planners should bear in mind. I doubt whether they will, for Dr. Rhodes Boyson is even now encouraging local authorities to abandon comprehensive schools. But I am grateful that Mrs. Williams isolated at least two causes of instability which have affected quality, and for which teachers were by no means wholly responsible.

Yet the debate as a whole, like various other I.T.V. and B.B.C. programmes and the Regional Conferences, if press reports are to be believed, all proved very disappointing. And why? I disliked the way many participants used words with such gay abandon, often expressing prejudice, that is judgement unsupported by adequate evidence, rather than reasoned opinion. This seemed odd, for when criticising the educational achievements of children it is as well to behave like an educated person oneself.

Of course, there were notable exceptions. Mrs. Williams resolutely refused to express opinions that the facts did not warrant. When she showed the increase in the number of children taking O and A levels, she fairly concluded there was no occasion for despair. And when she added that research had shown that standard in inner Manchester had declined and in Oxfordshire improved (not, by the way surprising since the former had lost and the latter gained some of the more enterprising families) she gave as fair and accurate summary of the present statistical evidence as is available.

But the views of some of the others astonished me. Some parents thought education was improving: others that it was worsening, and only on the evidence of their own children's experience with one school. An ex-headteacher was scathing about today's quality, caused he claimed by progressive ideas, but evidence on the number or proportion of schools using progressive methods, and on the alleged lower standards was never produced. An industrialist blamed the schools because recruits to his firm were of very poor quality, ignoring the fact that greater educational opportunity since the war had radically changed the opportunities of poor but able children so that they now seldom enter unskilled or even skilled manual jobs, but through further education seek more responsible and satisfying employment. So he was not comparing like with like.

All these on the basis of very limited personal experience generalised on the state of education as a whole. They reminded me of the child who, on a school journey, saw on a French railway station a porter with a wooden leg. And to his family at home the child wrote "All the porters in France have wooden legs". At all events, in this debate evidence of the kind presented would not have hanged the proverbial cat.

My second disappointment was the absence of honesty and humility in so many participants, there being a deplorable tendency to blame others, pass the buck, refuse to accept personal or group

responsibility, and seek a scapegoat elsewhere. The industralist previously mentioned complained that children seeking employment did not know what seven nines were, and if it is true I deplore it too. But when someone suggested he should take some responsibility for the further education of his own employees, he indignantly declined. Similarly, one of the parents spoke as if teachers alone were responsible for children's achievements. I do not question the right of industrialists and parents to criticise teachers and to expect them to act responsibly. But teachers have an equal right to criticise parents, industrialists, managers, governors, local authorities, governments and all those who influence people with the written or spoken word when they do not behave responsibly. But whether or not we criticise others, would it not be wise to ask whether we ourselves are performing our duties satisfactorily? Such an honest acceptance of personal and group responsibility would certainly produce results.

And my third complaint about the debates was that words freely used had no single agreed meaning. Have you ever read the warning of Confucius? "If language is not correct", he said, "then that which is said is not what is meant: if what is said is not what is meant then what ought to be done remains undone".

"National standards", "core curriculum", and "national assessment", were terms frequently used. But what did they mean? Standards in what? Standards based on age or development? Standards for all or for some? Standards fixed by whom? What is in the core? Is it confined to the 3 R's or does it include history, geography, biology, chemistry, physics, music, art and religious knowledge? Who is to decide what the core is? Who is to assess the results? How are the results to be assessed? Are the results to be made public? All these questions were never answered clearly. Indeed the concepts were vague, insubstantial, shrouded in mystery, and certainly formed no basis for action. Thus I question whether the "Great Debate" will lead to great actions.

I would have preferred another approach, and even now it is not too late to try it. I would have liked the Secretary of State to meet representatives of each of the main groups involved in education, teachers, local authorities, teachers in Colleges of Education and Universities, parent/teacher groups, the C.B.I. and the T.U.C., to pose the simple question: What do you propose to do to improve matters? Perhaps it is difficult for Mrs. Williams to do this, for she might be met by the rejoinder, "Before you ask us, what about yourself?" But if we are going to achieve real quality, every group and every person involved directly or indirectly in the education service should ask and answer the question, "What is my group or what am I going to do about it?"

I now wish to do two things—first to examine what is meant by quality in education and then to ask the question what needs to be done to improve quality.

According to my dictionary "quality" means "degree of excellence". As an idea that is easily grasped, but when the words "of education" are added the concept immediately becomes less clear. For there is no universally accepted view as to what excellence in education really is. Good education is as variable in meaning as the good life; for standards vary. To one a good education is that which sustains and strengthens military might; to another, the

salvation of the soul. To one it is the development of individualism, to another subservience to family or state. To one, it enables youths to earn a living, to others, to develop a social being. Clearly no public education system can serve all these conflicting ends, so in a multi-cultural and multi-religious country like ours, people accept that only generally agreed objectives can be pursued. And what in practice are these? The 3 R's, the essential skills on which the acquisition of many kinds of knowledge depends; some understanding of how our country and the world have evolved, of the physical world around us, and of the science on which modern life so largely depends; some forms of experience like music, art and handicraft, and habits of tidiness, accuracy and an enquiring mind.

Now degrees of excellence in all these fields cannot be easily ascertained. It is usually thought to be simple in the case of the 3 R's. I am not sure that it is, for in reading the relative values given to phrasing, emphasis, accent and understanding, in writing to neatness, punctuation, writing, lay-out, spelling, ideas and imagination and in arithmetic to neatness, accuracy, method and lay-out are all subjective judgements which vary from person to person. Nevertheless the 3 R's can be more accurately measured than most subjects. There is a greater element of subjectivity in measuring History, Geography and Science, a bigger one still in measuring forms of experience and the greatest of all in measuring attitudes of mind. This, however, does not mean that there can be no degree of excellence in these spheres, only that measurement depends to a lesser or greater extent on the measurers, and since their measuring rods differ, measurement differs too. Thus quality education will always be a matter of dispute.

But has the quality or the degree of excellence of education declined? Bearing in mind the variable nature of subjective judgements, on the whole I do not think so. Certainly, as already shown, C.S.E., O Level and A Level results have improved. Certainly the standards of physical education, achieved through school meals, medical and dental care, hygiene, physical training and sport has never been higher. Health, weight and height records confirm this. Certainly musical standards have improved, as school choirs, bands and the sale of musical instruments to schools testify. I suspend judgement on the achievements of the non-academic child who does not take C.S.E., simply because there is no evidence one way or another, though I suspect less progress has been made here because we have never before had to devise a challenging course for a non-academic child up to the age of 16. And to be honest, I believe standards of behaviour in school have declined, but for this the teacher is not to blame, as I shall later show.

But, alas, whilst we are disputing over whether standars have risen or fallen, we are not concentrating on the much more important question of what can be done to improve existing standards whatever they may be.

This, however cannot be answered in one word, phrase or sentence. "The truth", wrote Oscar Wilde, "is seldom pure and never simple", and the solution to this problem is far from simple. To declare as some do, that a return to old-fashioned methods, to the tripartite system, or to corporal punishment will alone revolutionise educational standards, postulates a golden age that never

existed and promises a rosy future that can never be realised.

Indeed, there is no one solution to the problem of improving quality, as I shall try to show, and many people besides teachers must make a contribution.

Now what contribution should the teacher make? I begin with the teacher, not because I think him most important in securing quality education, for, strangely enough, I do not. I agree with Professor Halsey whose research showed that the major determinant of educational quality was not teachers or curriculum, but social situations, motivation and support from the family and community. Alas how little has been heard of these in recent debates! But I start with teachers least any should think I am placing all burden of improving quality on others.

A few important demands have to be made on teachers apart from obvious ones like well-prepared interesting lessons, and constant reading and frequent attendance at Teachers' Centres and In-Service Courses to keep abreast of developments. First, remember you now live and work in a goldfish bowl and act accordingly. The more money that is spent on education the more the quality of the product will be questioned, and the more the public will discuss the failures and successes of individual schools.

The day when teachers worked in rooms with windows set high in the walls and in schools surrounded by high walls insulated from the public, are gone for ever. Public accountability, once meant no more than accountability to a managerial body and a Local Authority, which generally cared little about what happened in school so long as there were no complaints. Public accountability now means accountability not only to one's employers but to individual parents, newspapers, T.V., radio and the public at large. Now those who live in goldfish bowls should not act as if they were invisible. At all times teachers should act in such a way that, should it be necessary, they can justify their actions.

Secondly, teachers should clearly understand what their freedom is, and what responsibilities it places on them. Now the teachers' curricular freedom is not and never has been absolute. Indeed what freedom is absolute? Even freedom of speech is circumscribed by laws on public order, defamation and obscenity. The teachers' freedom is circumscribed too. " We have confused freedom with the free and easy ", said Adlai Stevenson, and some publicists in the last few months have suggested that teachers' freedom has meant a free and easy attitude, and that in fact they are autonomous and can do as they like. This has never been so. External examinations like C.S.E. O and A levels clearly limit freedom of action. So does the school community, for each member of the staff cannot pursue his own curriculum and methods, ignoring the views of his colleagues. There must be a consensus. Then again, what the philosopher A. N. Whitehead called the " professional consensus " is another limiting factor.

It may be somewhat generalised in form, but on major matters it is powerful. What teacher, for example, would exclude reading, arithmetic, literature, history or music from the curriculum? If he did, he would be condemned not only by parents and the authorities but by his own colleagues everywhere. And lastly, there is one other limitation on teachers' freedom of action, namely parents. They can protest vocally to the teacher, protest with their

feet by removing children to another school, or even complain to L.E.As or governing bodies. Thus teachers' freedom only exists within the constraints of external exams, school policy, professional consensus and parents' wishes. But nevertheless it is real. Within these constraints teachers can freely choose text books, details of the curriculum and methods.

Milton's words are a warning here. "None can love freedom heartily", he wrote, "but good men. The rest love not freedom but licence." Now licence will not be tolerated in a publicly provided service, and to preserve freedom teachers must act responsibly.

And this is important to teachers, for the more others determine in detail what teachers should do, the lower their professional status. It is important to children too. For education related to the aptitude and ability of individual children cannot be determined by remote authority, but only by the teacher who knows the child's precise needs. So to teachers I would say "Don't object when parents, industrialists, and others express in broad terms what they think the curriculum should be, but think out all the details yourselves with great care, explain to parents what you are trying to do and carry them with you. In these ways your freedom can be retained."

And thirdly, I would like to say "Clear your minds about the methods you use so that you can justify them". And for this there is but one test, their effectiveness.

In recent weeks, again and again I have read of demands for a return to traditional methods, but I really do not know what it means. For methods have been changing all the time, so what exactly are the methods to which we should return? Those of 1870, 1900, 1920, 1930 or what? Should we teach geography by making children learn lists of capes, bays, rivers and mountains by rote, or Physics, Botany and Chemistry by demonstration lessons rather than by letting the child do the experiments or drawing by using cubes, prisms and spheres as models, or foreign languages by starting with grammar rather than conversation, or physical education by a return to marching, forming fours and wheeling? Or if we are to be even more traditional, must we return to Latin and Greek instead of modern languages and exclude science altogether? Oddly enough the anti- "progressive", the anti- "modern methods" brigade are seldom so precise. Though they are not very explicit, I doubt if they want a return to Victorian traditionalism. Perhaps they are only saying somewhat ineptly that a rigidly structured curriculum making big demands on children, firm discipline, and learning tables are all fundamentally important.

Now let us examine the question honestly. Any teacher will admit that education suffers as much as the rag trade from swings in fashion. Any teacher will admit that there is a vast army of self-styled curriculum experts, usually without actual teaching experience, who have a vested interest in change. Most teachers will admit, too, that there is a minority of teachers, who, like the Ephesians of old "spend their time in nothing else but to tell or hear some new thing". And most teachers will ruefully admit that the pressures to change have been enormous, so that some have adopted new techniques against their better judgement, and others have been bewildered by the multiplicity of the demands for change. "How can I", asked a junior school head teacher of me "at one

and the same time introduce a new approach to religious education, the new maths and more practical methods in history, geography and science, when I haven't even time to master the literature about the changes?".

Am I then against changes in techniques? Not at all. My objections are to the false antithises presented. On my right in the red corner, they seem to say, are the modernists and on my left in the blue corner the traditionalists. This confrontation, this cowboys versus Indians, goodies versus baddies approach, so beloved of T.V. interviewers, newspaper men, or participants in public debate, is completely unreal. There are few if any teachers who have rejected all traditional ways and few if any who have made no concessions to new thinking. Every teacher I know is a mixture of traditionalist and modernist even though the proportions vary

So what should I say to teachers? Do not base all your teaching on repetition, memorization and cramming, on what Churchill called " this renowned system of intensive poultry farming ". That does not mean, however, that all repetition or memorization is bad. I personally believe tables should be memorized. On the other hand, do not fall into the error that change is synonymous with progress. Remember what C. H. Spurgeon said, " not all change is progress as the pigeon said when it got out of the net and into the pie ".

In short, use your judgement. Methods are not good because they are old and bad because they are new, or vice versa. A method, old or new, is good if in your situation it can make learning more effective: it is bad if it does not. You can retain toughness in education, you can stretch individuals intellectually, and yet make education less boring and more interesting and exciting. And when you have decided, put it into practice. If it doesn't work, amend or reject it. If it does, defend it against all comers and you'll be on strong ground, because you are doing this solely to make a child's learning more effective.

Next I come to parents, and the part they should play in promoting quality education.

First, a simple request: they should make sure their children attend school regularly. A proportion of children, bigger than it used to be, absent themselves from school so often that their education must be adversely affected. Parents should prevent this.

Secondly, they should insist on reasonable behaviour from their children at all imes. Swearing at adults, a couldn't-care-less attitude, a belief there is no right and wrong, a contempt for all authority, are all far too common amongst children. When I was teaching my colleagues and I occasionally came across a difficult child, but I never met nor heard of one who swore at a teacher or who was persistently recalcitrant. Teachers today tell a different story, of swearing, petty theft, vandalism, wilful disobedience and truancy. Teachers in one area have themselves run a course on " The Distruptive Child ". A well-researched report from Staffordshire entitled " Disruptive Pupils in School " says there were 230 suspensions in three years in Staffordshire. No doubt these numbers do not sound alarmist but disruptive pupils create difficulties in school out of all proportion to their numbers. The Report goes on to say that schools by law operate within a compulsory framework in a society which at best stresses liberty accompanied by responsibility, but which frequently by word or deed advocates licence, doing your

own thing, and every man for himself. So many children, having no restrictions at home, resent the inescapable restrictions which must be imposed inside school, with the result that they indulge in varying sorts of anti-social behaviour, from bullying to booby-traps, from fighting to knifing, from assaults on pupils to assaults on teachers. I am astonished that the educational ill effects of the disruptive pupil have not been related to educational quality in the Great Debate. Disruption is not the responsibility of teachers, but of those parents whose standards produce the disruptive child. So to parents I can only reiterate the advice given by Mr. David McNee, the successor to Sir Robert Mark, "Control your children in a proper way. That would go a long way to reduce crime", and I would add, reduce disruption in school and improve education.

Thirdly, parents should give their children ready access to books and papers, supplemented by the use of the Public Library. T.V. and radio are not substitutes for books, only supplements. The mental discipline of reading a book, the feeling for words and grammatical structure, the steady accumulation of a vast amount of information, the deepening of understanding, in short, the basis of a good education is thus freely available to the fortunate children from the book-loving home, but denied to others. So in this teachers require the co-operation of parents.

Fourthly, I wish parents would co-operate more with the school in other ways by motivating the child, by encouraging him to draw, paint, read, visit places of interest, and to be intellectually curious about everything. Such a child always achieves more in school. And then parents should treat the teacher as a fellow educator, as an ally in bringing up the child. They should try to understand what the teacher is doing, visiting the school open days, parent-teacher meetings and on any occasion when consultation with the teacher would help.

And fifthly, I wish all parents and indeed everybody would realise that the society which their thoughts and actions shape, is a vast educational instrument, often more powerful than schools. It can thus operate to uplift individuals or to drag them down. Tolstoy visited France in 1860. He was appalled at the schools he visited, thinking them anti-educational in their effect. Yet to his surprise, he discovered French citizens were not rude, ignorant and prejudiced as one might have expected, but civilised, affable and largely unprejudiced. Then Tolstoy realised what many today do not realise, that much learning takes place outside school, and that society itself is educative. A city like Marseilles with its libraries, museums, theatres and cafes provided a more effective education than ordinary schooling.

Now it is still possible today in England for a child to be brought up in a sector of society, so enlightened and civilised that an enlightened school can only add to the child's already rich educational experience. But many children are brought up in an atmosphere at worst of prejudice, physical violence, theft, unstable homes and opposition to authority, and at best of social irresponsibility. These are dire educational and social handicaps, against which schools must fight a losing battle. Alas, few have seen and even fewer have mentioned that much of society's values is making the task of securing quality education ever more difficult.

And lastly, I must analyse the responsibilities of Governments

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and Local Authorities. I am linking the two, since they are jointly responsible for providing the necessary resources. Recently we have witnessed the unedifying spectacle of the Government blaming Local Authorities for the cuts in education and Local Authorities blaming the Government. Mr. Mulley, when he was Secretary of State, declared that enough money had been put into the Rate Support Grant to maintain staffing ratios, with the implication that the responsibility for cuts lay wholly with the Local Authorities. It is true that in calculating the Rate Support Grant enough was included to maintain existing standards, but that is not the whole truth. For the Rate Support Grant is so designed that once a share of it has been allotted to a Local Authority it can be spent on anything the Authority wishes inside or outside the educational system: and further when the Government decided to allot more of the Rate Support Grant to the large urban areas and less to the rural areas, urban areas had more to spend and rural areas less, so that it was easier for urban than for rural areas to maintain staffing standards. But on the other hand some Local Authorities interpreted Mr. Mulley's statement to mean that improving standards was against Government policy, and if the number of children fell it was their duty to reduce the number of teachers employed.

But the fact is the Government and the Government alone is responsible for fixing the total grant and for its distribution, and the Local Authorities are alone responsible for augmenting the grant by collecting rates and then determining how the mony available is to be distributed. That holding down the level of the grants increases the difficulties of Local Authorities cannot be disputed, but both Government and Local Authorities are together responsible for the resources education needs, and nothing is gained by regarding one or the other as wholly responsible.

But the provision of adequate resources is today's biggest problem, and this is directly related to the quality of education provided.

At a conference held in January 1970, Sir Edward (now Lord) Boyle said, " By far the biggest problem for British education as we enter the 1970's is, of course, money and resources ". But if the problem was big in 1970 it is far bigger today, for the pressure on educational resources is greater than at any time since the war. Unfortunately for the education service this squeeze on resources came at a time when there was more questioning of the quality of education provided. It was therefore inevitable that educational expenditure and quality would be linked, so that our enemies have said, " If that's what we get for spending so much ought we not to spend less? ", thus echoing the notorious Robert Lowe, who more than a century ago declared " If education is not efficient it shall be cheap ".

This is shallow and dangerous thinking. Whatever Robert Lowe and others thought or are thinking, good education costs more than bad. If after all waste has been eliminated less is spent on education, quality is lowered. So to eliminate or play down resources in the Great Debate is to ignore one of the main determinants of educational quality. Worse still it avoids the conclusion that lack of political will is lowering quality.

To begin with the obvious, education being a labour intensive industry, the present inadequate resources limit the number of teachers employed, produce massive teacher unemployment and a

poorer quality education than we need have. The planning of teacher supply has been deplorable. Years of under estimating the need for teachers have been followed by over-estimating, so that we have endured years of teacher shortage only to be followed by years of over-supply. The planners seem to find it impossible to get their sums right.

As a result thousands of unemployed teachers today wander the streets outside schools where employed teachers struggle with classes so large that individual attention to children becomes impossible and quality suffers. And the blame rests not on teachers but on the Government and Local Authorities.

Nor is the loss of individual instruction the only effect of limiting the employment of teachers. A Surrey head teacher faced with losing one full time Chemistry teacher or two part-time remedial teachers was in an impossible dilemma. Are not Chemistry and the 3 R's vitally important? Not, apparently, in Surrey.

H.M.I's have deplored the declining number of schools offering courses in a second modern language, but for this it is not difficult to find an important reason. The number of children wishing to study German, Russian, Italian or Spanish in addition to French is limited, and the staffing required is large in relation to the numbers involved. Thus schools being pressed to reduce or maintain existing staffing levels, simply cannot provide the necessary staff. So when many bemoan the slight attention paid to this or that subject or to backwardness in children, some or all of the responsibility is the Government's and Local Authorities'.

And next, Governments and to a lesser extent Local Authorities have considerable responsibility for the quality of teachers, and in this sphere also their record has been deplorable. Mrs. Williams has recently said " poor teachers were more to blame for ' failure schools ' than old buildings or tough areas ", a statement with which I agree entirely. But she should examine the record of her department on the matter of teacher quality. What of the pressure brought to bear on Training Colleges to qualify teachers the Colleges thought unfit, and on Local Authority Inspectors to give fully qualified teacher status to probationers they deemed unworthy? What of the constant pressure of the Department on teachers to agree to allow people with no education and no training to be allowed to teach? What of the resistance to the teachers' desire that the standards of entrance to training should be raised? What of the resistance, too, over a period of more than twenty years, to the teacher's demand that every teacher should be trained?

Let us be honest about this: the Department cared nothing for quality when there were not enough teachers.

But recriminations do not improve anything. In any case, Mrs. Williams was not responsible for the past and indeed to her credit, and despite financial pressures, she is today trying to develop in-service training. But (alas) not all Local Authorities are supporting her.

But there is something else she could do—she could emphasise that success in a teacher's life's work depends as much on teaching skill as on academic qualifications, with its corollary, that in Colleges of Education those with inadequate teaching skill should not be given qualifications.

Here I am drawing on the experience of one more qualified to speak than I. In a recent article in the Hong Kong Teachers'

Journal entitled "The Last Word", Professor C. H. Dobinson, former Professor of Education at Reading, describes his attitude to the task of Chief Examiner to Colleges of Education and Universities. Now the Chief Examiner is the man or woman who has the last word as to whether a student qualifies or not as a teacher. Professor Dobinson said that in assessing theoretical knowledge and using the evidence of conscientious work and mental capacity, he always found the College or University teachers in agreement with him. But in assessing practical teaching he found few willing to take his view. This view was simple and straightforward. Said he "unless the aspiring teacher has shown that she (or even he) can control a class and teach them something, I am quite unmoved by marks in the distinction bracket of the theoretical aspects of education.

In my judgement education is as practical a subject as plumbing and a teacher aspirant who cannot teach, even under difficult circumstances, is of no more interest to me than a plumber who cannot, even under difficult conditions, repair my water supply or my drainage". Now this conclusion is obvious to every practical teacher and certainly to every head teacher. Yet sadly Professor Dobinson concludes "Almost every College for which I have worked has been most reluctant to fail any student".

Now in the past this was understandable; all the pressures save that of Professor Dobinson and a few like-minded men, favoured quantity. "Never mind the quality", they seemed to say, "feel the width". But now the accent should be on quality. So let the Minister urge Colleges and Universities to demand high quality recruits, and for the sake of the nation's children and for the job satisfaction of the teacher, to refuse to qualify any lacking practical skills. I am not advocating Draconian measures. It should be obvious early in the College course which students are unlikely to make good teachers and they should be guided to some more suitable vocation.

And now having shown that Governments and to a lesser extent Local Authorities having bungled teacher supply both quantitatively and qualitatively, with the inevitable consequence of depressing the quality of education, let me mention a few recent acts of some Local Authorities that also depress the quality of education. First, some are spending less on teachers' in-service training. It's difficult or impossible in some areas for a teacher to obtain time off with salary or financial aid to attend a course, and the result is teachers and education are not as good as they could be.

Secondly, a number of Local Authorities have stabilised or reduced capitation allowances, or if you like, book allowances. Even to maintain last year's allowance, when inflation made books even more expensive, the only answer was to reduce the number purchased. But to cut the allowance, as some propose, is to reduce the number purchased drastically. Perhaps these Local Authorities will be good enough to tell us how literacy and numeracy can be achieved with an inadequate supply of books.

Thirdly, Local Authorities have cut the supply of assistants by about 20%. A reciprocal scheme has been devised by Britain, France and Germany, by which a number of university students and would-be teachers, wishing to learn another language thoroughly spend a period of time teaching in the schools of the appropriate country. This is invaluable, not only to the student

but the host-school, for a French assistant in an English school (for example) can improve the students' French conversation, make tapes of value for years to come and improve language laboratory programmes. Every school that has had an assistant testifies as to the valuable aid given in language teaching. H.M.I's have confirmed this; and now we have the ludicrous situation of vigorous complaints about the quality of modern language teaching, whilst France and Germany are offering more places for assistants and we are offering fewer (which does not improve our image abroad) and English children are denied the services of the foreign assistants they badly need.

Then, fourthly, to make the task of achieving literacy and numeracy even more difficult some Local Authorities are cutting back on nursery school provision. A recent Malaysian Report shows that most drop-outs in primary education occur because children enter school unprepared, and being unable to keep up with their more fortunate friends, lose hope. So Malaysia is introducing a compensatory programme. All this merely confirms our own experience. We need nursery schools here not merely as a convenience to working mothers and as a means of providing better health treatment, though these are important, but to provide the essential basis on which primary education can be successfully pursued. If Local Authorities are really concerned about educational quality they should increase, not decrease, nursery provision.

Is it then surprising that teachers are resentful of the present spate of teacher-bashing? I am astonished at the facile way in which newspapers, T.V. and radio, all of which pride themselves on their balance and fair play, have not focussed some attention on the effects of parental neglect and Government and Local Authority cuts on the quality of the education provided. But no, scape-goats make better copy and so too do simplistic and absurd solutions to the problem of quality like abolishing comprehensive schools, modern methods and modern discipline.

But truth is many sided and to achieve higher quality demands the will to act in a hundred ways, even to the point of sacrifice, on the part of teachers, managers, governors, local authorities the government, parents, newspapers, radio and T.V. and the community as a whole. I have indicated a few of the ways. There are many more. If the groups I mentioned cared enough, if they all really believed children deserve and should have the best we can provide, it would not be long before we saw an enormous improvement in quality. There is no cheap solution, no easy way, no short cut. There are difficult challenges to us all, to which if we really care for the future of this country we should all respond.